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WHEN DEVILS WALK THE EARTH

The Mentality and Roots of Terrorism, and How to Respond

by Ralph Peters

Note: This analysis is divided into three parts. The first is a broad initial discussion of the mentalities of the two basic types of terrorists--the practical and the apocalyptic--to help users differentiate between “traditional,” politically-oriented terrorists with specific goals, and the far more dangerous religious terrorists irreconcilably hostile to the United States and the West. The second section examines the environmental conditions that breed terrorism, focusing primarily upon the troubled Islamic world. The concluding section proposes “do’s and don’ts” in the struggle against terrorism.

I. The Monster’s Mind

There are two basic types of terrorists: The practical and the apocalyptic. While there are exceptions to each basic pattern, gray areas in between the two categories, and rare terrorists who evolve from one type into the other (usually from the practical to the apocalyptic), these remain the two most useful classifications in attempts to understand and defeat our enemies who employ terror. Our failure to distinguish between the different threats posed by these two very different types of terrorists led to fatal

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misjudgments, such as the conviction that skyjackers should not be opposed in the air, since any action would only endanger passengers—based upon the assumption that aircraft seized by terrorists were bargaining chips, not weapons. But the actions of the practical terrorist, to whom we have grown accustomed, are calculated to change political circumstances, while, for the apocalyptic terrorist, destruction is an end in itself, despite his extravagant statements about strategic objectives. For all his violence, the practical—political--terrorist is a man of hope. The religious, apocalyptic terrorist is a captive of his own rage, disappointments and fantasies. One may be controlled. The other must be killed.

Lesser Devils

Practical terrorists, with whom we long have struggled, may behave savagely, but they have tangible goals and a logical approach to achieving them. Their logic may be cruel or cynical, but there is a rational (if sometimes extreme or tenuous) relationship between their long-term goals, means, risks, assets and interim objectives. Ideology can dominate their thinking, but it does not break loose entirely from mundane reality; indeed, their struggle may be for elementary survival under oppressive conditions. While their convictions and techniques make them appear “fanatical” to the layman, their determination is fueled by the intellect and common emotions, not by the spiritual message or transcendent vision of the true fanatic.

Even when championing a particular religious minority, practical terrorists are concerned with rights, status and apportionment in the here and now, not beyond the grave (the IRA, for example, or the Stern Gang). They make perceived (or real) injustice their cause, not infidelity or apostasy, and may pay scant attention to the religious rituals of those whom they see themselves as defending. While an ideology may substitute for religion in their psychological make-up, as it did for many Communist true believers, their concerns are bellies, wallets, security, land and authority, not souls. Often, they bitterly reject the other-worldly promises of organized religion, which they may view as a tool of the established order, even as they develop their own secular liturgies. They may

be at once the self-appointed representatives of a religious minority and opponents of that minority's prevailing religious hierarchy (the Mollie Maguires in the Pennsylvania Anthracite fields in the nineteenth century, or Quebecois separatists in Canada's more recent history).

Even when practical terrorists routinely invoke their religious affiliation, they tend to think in terms of birth and bloodlines (as did virtually all terrorist para-militaries in the former Yugoslavia, no matter their confession). Critically, they view their own deaths as a misfortune, however necessary or noble, and not as an embrace of the divine. They would rather live than die, and regard death as final, not as a promotion. They approach the theological plane only in the cloudy belief that they will "live on" in the people whose cause they have made their own. They want rewards on earth, and do not expect them in heaven.

The practical terrorist may have ambitious dreams—the overthrow of a state or the institution of a radically-new political system—and may be willing to undergo great hardship and sacrifice to pursue those dreams—but he (or she) is rarely suicidal and does not view death and destruction as goals unto themselves. He is conservative in the sense that he wishes to preserve a party organization, or just his small cell, for the day when he imagines he or his fellow conspirators will "take over." Suicide attacks are extreme tools to him, employed only in desperation and against targets of great value or prestige.

The practical terrorist may be convinced of his beliefs and embittered from society and "the system," but his goals are always the re-creation of the society or state, not its total annihilation. He may be willing to kill thousands, to use torture, and to subject others to his brutal will, but the environment he wishes to inhabit in the bright future he foresees is of this earth, and there are other flesh-and-blood human beings in it. The practical terrorist may attract helpers who enjoy destruction or cruelty for their own sakes, but the overall terrorist organization remains focused upon political goals that the terrorist leadership judges to be attainable.

While some practical terrorists may be such die-hard believers they will fight to the death (or undertake desperate suicide missions), others may mature beyond their terrorist backgrounds, may prove open to some forms of compromise, and can be capable of a degree of give and take with secular authorities (consider how the image of Yasser Arafat

has changed with the years). Some are implacable and obsessive, but others will settle for incremental changes—or can be co-opted into an evolving political system (one thinks of those contemporary European politicians, exemplified by Germany’s brilliant foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, who grew from left-wing street-fighter or conspiratorial backgrounds into surprisingly adept and conscientious statesmen). There are many sub-divisions of the practical-terrorist category, and it is the task of law enforcement and intelligence services to further differentiate between them. For some, affiliation with terrorist groups is a thrilling fad they later abandon; for others, it is an all-consuming mission from which they can never extract themselves psychologically. Some can be frightened, persuaded or bought, while others must be killed, and it is a very sloppy, foolish state that neglects to distinguish the transient helper from the hardcore killer.

There usually are lines the practical terrorist will not cross—some groups he wishes to protect, certain tools he will not employ, or some self-imposed limitations upon the scale of his actions (it is extremely unlikely that such a terrorist would employ biological or nuclear weapons, although he might make limited use of chemical weapons; should a domestic terrorist employ NBC weapons, he likely would be a psychotic or a member of a delusional group with an apocalyptic vision—and germ warfare, especially, is most liable to be waged along racial or religious lines). While the practical terrorist may commit certain deeds to create an atmosphere of terror among a target group or audience, the good opinion of at least a portion of the public remains important to him. He may misread public sentiment and deceive himself about his image, his effect and the ultimate possibility of attaining his goals, but he does not detach himself entirely from the day-to-day world and its concerns, nor does he fully escape the psychology of popular morality. He may commit atrocious acts—setting off car bombs in public places, kidnapping the innocent relations of his chosen enemies, and committing assassinations—but the scale of his actions is usually limited, despite the attendant drama. Perfectly willing to demolish police stations or government offices, he does not destroy entire cities, which he would rather rule than wreck. He wants to lead “his people” to power or to independence, not to their deaths.

The practical terrorist's morality may be very different from that of the average American, and he even may be psychologically unbalanced, but he does not disregard the value of human life entirely. He may commit grand gestures in frustration or desperation (or because he possesses a flair for exploiting the media), but he continues to see himself as the representative of an earthly agenda, not as a divine missionary. He tends to see history as a progression which requires his assistance—not as a collapse toward a longed-for armageddon. Though subject to bouts of depression, he is ultimately the more hopeful and less pessimistic terrorist. He is concerned with his own failures and those of his group, but not convinced that all those who believe otherwise are eternally damned and condemned to annihilation, or that a sinful world must be consumed by fire. In his dark way, he believes in redemption of the masses, in the possibility that they can, through example, education or force, be convinced that his way is the enlightened way. The practical terrorist always sees more to be captured than destroyed. He wants prizes. Willing and able to dehumanize specific targets, he is often surprisingly sentimental about specific objects, individuals or those human types or classes whom he idealizes.

The practical terrorist's commitment to his cause may remain relatively constant, but his actions can be inconsistent—now violent, now passive, violent again, then accommodating. He may be capable of abrupt changes in his perception of who constitutes the “enemy” and how the enemy should be opposed. He is deadly, but usually a greater threat to individuals he deems “guilty” than to the masses. Setbacks can be difficult for him to rationalize and he may undergo periods of despair which transform his perception of how best to further his cause. He is usually the terrorist of lesser strength, and always the terrorist of lesser menace. Although we may, in our outrage, term him a madman, his mentality remains recognizably like our own (except in the case of psychotics). There is logic to his actions.

The practical terrorist's hellish counterpart, the apocalyptic terrorist, is mentally divorced from our world and its values, and from any respect for flesh and blood. The practical terrorist has dreams, but the apocalyptic terrorist is lost in a nightmare.

The Original Smart Bombs

The “pure” practical terrorist is an idealist, sometimes very well-educated (historically, secular universities have been excellent recruiting grounds for terrorists who want to force improvement upon the world). While it may seem counter-intuitive, the apocalyptic, religious terrorist tends to be recruited from the ranks of the fearful and threatened, from among the worried, not the confident; he is a coward in the face of life, if not in the face of death (this is absolutely applicable to the key operatives of the September 11th, 2001, plot).

Despite the media-driven image of Islamic terrorists representing hordes of the Faithful, apocalyptic terrorists, such as the members of al Qa’eda, tend to act out of intensely-personal disaffection and a sense of alienation from social norms, while the practical terrorist is more apt to feel driven by group grievances (though he, too, is rarely a “successful” member of society before his conversion to terror). The apocalyptic terrorist “wants out,” while the practical terrorist wants “back in,” although on much-improved terms of his own dictation (another aspect of this psychology is that practical terrorists, even when involved in international movements, prefer to focus on the locale of their personal grievances, while apocalyptic terrorists view the greater world as their enemy and are far more likely to transpose blame from their own societies onto other cultures).

While both types find comfort—a home and brotherhood—in the terrorist organization, the practical terrorist imagines himself as a representative of his people, while the apocalyptic terrorist sees himself as chosen and apart, despite his occasional rhetoric about protecting the masses adhering to his faith. The practical terrorist idealizes his own kind—his people--while the apocalyptic terrorist insists that only his personal ideals have any validity. The practical terrorist is impassioned and imagines that his deeds will help his brethren in the general population, while the apocalyptic terrorist is detached from compassion by his faith and only wants to punish the “sinful,” whom he finds ever more numerous as he is progressively hypnotized by the dogma that comforts him.

Except for the most cynical gunmen, practical terrorists believe that mankind can be persuaded (or forced) to regret past errors and make amends, and that reform of the masses is possible (although a certain amount of coercion may be required). But apocalyptic terrorists (such as Osama bin Laden) are merciless. Practical terrorists may see acts of retribution as a tactical means, but apocalyptic terrorists view themselves as tools of a divine and uncompromising retribution. Retribution against unbelievers, heretics and even their own brethren whose belief is less pure is the real strategic goal of apocalyptic terrorists, even when they do not fully realize it themselves or cannot articulate it. Even among average Americans, there is often a great gulf between what they consciously think they believe and the “slumbering” deeper beliefs that catalytic events awaken—such as the frank thirst for revenge felt by tens of millions of “peaceful” Americans in the wake of the events of September 11th. It is considerably less likely that a morally-crippled, obsessed, apocalyptic terrorist cocooned in an extreme religious vision will be able to articulate his real goals; we cannot know apocalyptic terrorists by their pronouncements so well as by their deeds, since much of what they say is meant to make their intentions seem more innocent or justified than they are.

Often, apocalyptic terrorists are lying even to themselves. Apocalyptic terrorists are whirling in the throes of a peculiar, malignant madness, and barely know what they believe in the depths of their souls—in fact, much of their activity is an attempt to avoid recognition of the darkness within themselves, a struggle to depict themselves as (avenging) angels of light. Centuries ago, we might have said they were possessed by devils. Today, we must at least accept that they are possessed and governed by a devilish vision.

The practical terrorist punishes others to force change. The religious terrorist may speak of changes he desires in this world, but his true goal is simply the punishment of others—in the largest possible numbers—as an offering to the bloodthirsty, vengeful God he has created for himself. This apocalyptic terrorist may identify himself as a Muslim or a Christian, but he is closer akin to an Aztec sacrificing long lines of prisoners on an altar of blood (one of the many psychological dimensions yet to be explored in terrorist studies is the atavistic equation of bloodshed with cleansing—an all-too-literal bath of blood).

No change in the world order will ever content the apocalyptic terrorist, since his actual discontents are internal to himself and no alteration in the external environment could sate his appetite for retribution against those he needs to believe are evil and guilty of causing his personal sufferings and disappointments—for such men, suicidal acts have a fulfilling logic, since only their own destruction can bring them lasting peace. Above all, they need other humans to hate while they remain alive—the only release for the profound self-hatred underlying the egotism that lets them set themselves up as God’s judges—as imitation Gods themselves—upon this earth. In theological terms, there is no greater blasphemer in any religion than the killer who appoints himself as God’s agent, or assumes a godlike right to judge entire populations for himself, but the divine mission of the apocalyptic terrorist leaves no room for theological niceties. Pretending to defend his religion, he creates a vengeful splinter religion of his own.

The health of any religious community can be gauged by the degree to which it rejects these bloody apostles of terror, and the Islamic world’s acceptance of apocalyptic terrorists as heroes is perhaps the most profound indicator of its spiritual crisis and decay. Make no mistake: The terrorist “martyrs” of September 11th, 2001, and Osama bin Laden will be remembered by Islamic historians and by generation after generation of Muslim children as great heroes in the struggle for true religion and justice—no matter what Islamic governments may say to please us, many millions of Muslims around the world felt tremendous pride in the atrocities in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. This makes it all the more vital that the United States kill Osama bin Laden, exterminate al Qa’eda, destroy the Taliban, and depose any other governments found to have supported their terrorism. If Osama bin Laden survives to thumb his nose at an “impotent superpower,” he will attract hundreds of thousands of supporters, and tens of millions more sympathizers. He is already a hero, and he must not be allowed to remain a triumphant one. An apocalyptic terrorist of the worst kind, his superficial agenda (deposing the government of Saudi Arabia, expelling U.S. troops from the Middle East, imposing Sharia law) is nothing compared to his compulsion to slaughter and destroy.

Although his vision is closer to the grimmest passages of Christianity’s Book of Revelation than to anything in the Koran, Osama bin Laden has been able to convince countless Muslims that his vision is of the purest and proudest Islamic form. This should

be a huge warning flag to the West about the spiritual crisis in the Islamic world. Logic of the sort cherished on campuses and in government bureaucracies does not apply. This battle is being fought within the realms of the emotions and the soul, not of the intellect. We face a situation so perverse that it is as if tens of millions of frustrated Christians decided that Kali, the Hindu Goddess of death and destruction, embodied the true teachings of Jesus Christ. We are witnessing the horrific mutation of a great world religion, and the Islamic world likely will prove the greatest breeding ground of apocalyptic terrorists in history.

Small and vicious gods

The belief systems of practical terrorists are often modular; some such men can learn, evolve, synthesize or re-align their views. But the apocalyptic terrorist cannot tolerate any debate or dissent—all divergent opinions are a direct threat to his mental house of cards. The apocalyptic terrorist embraces a totality of belief and maintains it with an ironclad resolution attained by only the most extreme—and psychotic—secular terrorists. From identifying himself as a tool of his God, he begins to assume his right to Godlike powers. The practical terrorist is in conflict with the existing system, but the apocalyptic terrorist sees himself as infinitely superior to it. The practical terrorist looks up at the authority he seeks to replace, but the apocalyptic terrorist looks down on the humankind he despises. Despise enforcing rigorous discipline within the terrorist organization, the practical terrorist nonetheless retains a sense of human imperfection. The religious, apocalyptic terrorist believes that those who are imperfect deserve extermination (in one of terrorism's gray area anomalies, the "secular" Nazi regime took on an essentially religious vision that embraced state terror—Hitler's attitude toward the Jews was astonishingly similar to Osama bin Laden's view of Jews, Christians and even secular Muslims; of course, the desire to please God or authority by slaughtering unbelievers has a long tradition in many religions, from medieval Catholicism to contemporary Hindu extremism).

Scared of the Girls

Both types of terrorists draw accomplices and foot-soldiers from the uneducated masses, but the leadership in each type of movement tends to have at least a smattering of higher education and may even be highly-intelligent and learned in terms of the host society's norms. In both cases, however, their vanity cannot satisfy itself with what the system offers. The terrorist is always an egotist with a (desperate, fragile) sense of unappreciated superiority, aggravated by his inability to establish satisfying social, personal or vocational relationships. The terrorist is convinced that he is right, but is not much concerned with being just. He wants to "show" the world or even God. At the core of many a terrorist leader is a spoiled brat disappointed by the failures of adulthood.

Perhaps the most routine commonality between the practical and apocalyptic terrorist is the male terrorist's inability to develop and maintain healthy, enduring relationships with women—although the practical terrorist is more apt to idealize members of the opposite sex, who then disappoint him, and to imagine himself re-created as a storybook hero of the sort he believes would appeal to his fantasy woman (Timothy McVeigh), while the apocalyptic terrorist fears, despises and hates females (Mohammed Atta, whose testament perfectly captured the Islamic fanatic's revulsion toward women).

Practical terrorists may be puritanical, but they are much more likely to accord women admission to and high status in their organizations (from numerous historical left-wing terrorist groups to the Tamil Tigers). Practical terrorists may even show an egalitarian attitude toward the sexes (though by no means always—it very much depends on societal context), while the apocalyptic terrorist usually mistrusts and shuns women (al Qa'eda and other Islamic terrorist organizations are classic examples, although some Christian fringe groups also seem to believe that the word "evil" is derived from the root word "Eve"). There is great cultural variation in the attitudes of terrorists of both kinds toward women and a few apocalyptic cults have even been led by female prophets, but apocalyptic terrorists generally denigrate or actively humiliate women far more often than they value them, while practical terrorists, at worst, relegate women to the status customary in the society in which they operate.

Nonetheless, the statistical inability of terrorists of both kinds to form enduring sexual relationships with a beloved partner is an aspect of terrorist psychology that has gone largely unexplored—we are so determined to be “serious” and to be taken seriously by our peers that we may have missed the forest for the trees. A review of historical terror cases makes it startlingly clear: Terrorists rarely have successful dating histories. Sexual fears and humiliation as young adults—and the consequent loneliness and alienation—may be the single greatest unrecognized catalyst in the making of a terrorist (whether Mohammed Atta or Timothy McVeigh). A terrorist’s passion for political reform or preserving rain forests, or his a compulsion to serve God through colossal destruction, may be more of a final symptom than a root cause.

Terrorists are disturbed, unhappy men. We have done an inadequate job of asking what has made them so unhappy that they seek release in killing their fellow men. We look for answers in economic statistics, while ignoring the furious power of the soul.

There have been plentiful exceptions, but the general rule is that the more repressed the society and the more fervent its rejection of reciprocity in sexual relations, the more terrorists it produces, and the greater the gap in social status between men and women in the society, the more likely it is to produce suicidal male terrorists. Societies that dehumanize women dehumanize everyone except those males in authority positions—and the ability to dehumanize his targets is essential to the psychology of the terrorist. While those who will become terrorists may wed to accommodate social norms or familial insistence, the rarest form of human being may be a happily-married terrorist.

Avenging Angels

Apocalyptic terrorists are a far more serious matter than even the deadliest practical terrorists, and these religion-robed monsters are at war with the United States and the West today. Jealous of our success and our power, terrified and threatened by the free, unstructured nature of our societies, and incapable of performing competitively in the twenty-first century, they have convinced themselves that our way of life is satanic and that we are the enemies of their religion and their god. Nothing we can do will persuade

them otherwise (it is a dangerous peculiarity of the West to imagine that we can “explain everything” satisfactorily to those who hate us—apocalyptic terrorists and their masses of sympathizers don’t want explanations, they want revenge).

Muslim apocalyptic terrorists do not understand the reality of our society or our daily lives, and they do not want to understand. They can live among us and see only evil, even as they enjoy a shabby range of pleasures, from video games to prostitutes. Their extreme vision of the world constructs evil even from good, and easily rationalizes away the virtues of other societies and civilizations. They *need* to hate us, and their hatred is the most satisfying element in their lives. Death and destruction delight them. They cannot be reasoned with, appeased, or even intimidated. No human voice can persuade the man who believes that God is speaking in his other ear. Apocalyptic terrorists must be destroyed. There is no alternative to killing the hardcore believers, and it may be necessary to kill thousands of them, if we are to protect the lives of millions of our own citizens.

We still fail to recognize that the atrocities of September 11th, 2001, composed the most successful—and dramatic—achievement of the Islamic world against the West in centuries, greater than the Ottoman victory at Gallipoli, the establishment of Arab states, the nationalization of the Suez Canal, or the Iranian Counter-Revolution of 1979. It was a *great* day in Muslim history, and it will be remembered as such, no matter what tribulations we visit upon the terrorist networks and their state accomplices in retaliation. This was their big win, and let us hope it is the only one.

II. The Fertile Fields of Terror

But don't we have our own fundamentalist terrorists?

There are certainly domestic terrorists in the United States who claim religious justification for their deeds, such as those who bomb planned parenthood clinics or murder doctors who perform abortions, or who perpetrate vicious hoaxes. But such men and women usually are practical terrorists, not apocalyptic, and have tangible social

goals. They do not seek to destroy entire populations, but to alter specific practices within a society of which they are otherwise hopeful. While the acceleration of societal (and technological) change and the attendant psychological disorientation may spark the rise of domestic apocalyptic cults that seek to jump-start armageddon, we have been lucky thus far—a tribute to the opportunities offered by our society and to our cultural robustness.

At present, the greatest domestic danger remains the lone psychotic triggered into action by the hate-filled rants of televangelists and other demagogues, by the insidious false communalism of the internet, or simply by a self-constructed vision. Abroad, the globalization of information has been the single most destabilizing factor in foreign cultures, and even here the information revolution has had its dark side, making the propaganda of prejudice and blame available as never before. Accusations that draw only laughter from the rest of us may spur the waiting madman to commit horrendous deeds, and, in the future, we who profit so richly from the free flow of information may find ourselves compelled to a more vigorous censorship of hate speech and the paraphernalia of bigotry. Much of the Islamic world has been poisoned by false, but wonderfully-comforting information, and we do not yet know the degree to which the same thing is happening here. The man of no prospects, in any culture or civilization, is always glad to be told that his failures are not his fault and that there is a target he can blame. Individual and group success disarms hatred more effectively than laws or lectures, and we must hope that our continued success is ever more inclusive of those citizens now relegated to the social fringes—from whose ranks the commandos of domestic terror are drawn.

Some of our domestic cult groups already have veered across the border toward apocalyptic behaviors, but most of these bands of believers are *introverted* millenarian movements that seek to inaugurate the “end of days” and the Kingdom of God by suicidal gestures, rather than by mass attacks on outsiders. We must be on guard against small groups who buckle psychologically under the pressures of modern life and take refuge in *extroverted* millenarian movements that lash out in attempts to bring down the heavens upon us all, but, for now at least, the greatest risk from apocalyptic movements comes from abroad—and overwhelmingly from the Islamic world. Christian extremists may yet turn to direct action to bring on “the end of days,” as they did five centuries ago (see

below), but our society appears to be sufficiently inclusive and promising to content all but a few alienated individuals and small cells with limited goals. Nonetheless, we are playing the odds, with no guarantees that events will not trigger greater domestic threats from those convinced that God requires them to kill.

Consider a few patterns of domestic religious “terrorism” to date, with their American twists and heritage:

The “Reverend” Jim Jones and the grape Kool-Aid mass suicide and murders in Jonestown, Guiana a generation ago, David Koresh’s Branch Davidians, or the odd If-I-kill-myself-God’s-spaceship-will-carry-me-away cult, are introverted millennial variations of terrorist movements, but are not usually classified under “terrorism” because their acts are directed against their own followers and themselves. They are as close as Americans have come, in our time, to domestic apocalyptic terrorism (even the Unabomber, who made a secular religion of his crusade against technological progress, targeted specific individuals in his attempts to “alert” our society and did not use his abilities to attack undifferentiated citizens in a broad manner). Fortunately, the tendency in contemporary Western cults with Christian roots is to retreat from society, rather than to try actively to reform it--withdrawal from the world long has been a tradition in the American grain, dating to the earliest New England settlements, whose inhabitants sought to build exclusive “cities on a hill” and who sought to divorce themselves from the perceived corruption and very real persecution of the Old World (the benign Shakers or the gentle Brethren of the Ephrata Cloister strike more responsive chords in the American psyche than do bloody cults).

As an aside, one of the reasons Eastern religions have a special resonance with many Christians—although not with Muslims—may be our conditioning over centuries to revere ascetic withdrawals from the world on the part of saints and lesser believers, from Saint Anthony to the Shakers. Such retreats bear recognizable similarities to the Buddhist and Hindu traditions of the renunciation of mortal things. Islam certainly has its ascetics and renunciations, but, as practiced today in the realms of Sharia law (as opposed to those sub-regions where the far less menacing Sufi traditions dominate belief), it is much more of an *applied* religion, with a much greater focus on efforts to censor and discipline the world that is—reminiscent of medieval Catholicism. Contrary

to recommending that believers “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s,” Muslims expect Caesar to render unto their faith, an attitude the Protestant Reformation blessedly deconstructed in the West.

Americans who sincerely believe that a remarriage of government and religion is just what the cosmic doctor ordered should be very careful what they wish for, since states wed to single religions consistently find that the relationship is bad for both the religion and the state—although profitable to demagogues, as in Iran. The practice of religion is always most free where its relationship with government is least adhesive, and, in every society, those who wish to impose one religion’s dominance on the state tend to be authoritarian in disposition. Osama bin Laden’s vision of a properly-run society is much closer to John Calvin’s oppressive Geneva than to the brilliance and humanity of Moorish Cordoba or the flowering of Samarkand--before the murder of Ulug Begh by the “mad mullahs” of the day (in fact, the intellectual and spiritual calcification of Islam can be dated precisely to that assassination five-and-a-half centuries ago).

In one of the many ironies of history, two great religions have swapped places over the last half millenium, with Christianity breaking free of medieval intellectual and social repression, while the once-effervescent world of Islam has embraced the comforts of shackles and ignorance. Today, at least, the Judeo-Christian world faces forward, while the Islamic world looks backward with longing and wallows in comforting myths.

About those myths...

Myth is far more powerful than fact, not only in the Islamic world, but wherever men and women seek absolution for their individual and collective failures. For all the Muslim world’s rhetoric about the damage done by the Crusades, internal Crusades within Europe—against heretics and Jews—took many more lives over the centuries than did pre-Renaissance Europe’s small-scale adventures in Palestine. Today, more Muslims live in the Washington, D.C. area than the total number of Crusaders who marched east over two centuries, and Washington does not feel under siege from these local residents. The power of the Crusader myth in today’s Middle East has far more to do with the

perception of collective failure and vulnerability than with reality—after all, the Islamic Ottomans conducted a centuries-long, much more successful crusade against Europe thereafter, and Islamic warriors threatened the marches of Europe well into the nineteenth century. Islamic invaders did far more damage to the Ukraine and Poland than the Crusaders did to Palestine. Those in the Middle East who cite the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem as an act of peerless historical viciousness might do well to remember Islam’s conquest of Constantinople and Budapest, and the Ottoman progress to the gates of Vienna. If the streets of Jerusalem ran with blood, so did the streets—and churches—of Constantinople. There is plenty of historical guilt to pass around. We are blessed to live in a civilization that has moved on—but we face threats from a civilization that clings to a cosmetically-enhanced past. While well-intentioned Westerners have gone to great lengths to refute Samuel Huntington’s thesis of a “clash of civilizations,” the man in the street in the Islamic world believes, intuitively, that the clash has been going on for a very long time, and no argument will dissuade him from his delicious belief in Western malevolence. How better to explain his wasted life in a ravaged state?

Until September 11th, 2001, the most appalling terrorist act on American soil since British atrocities during our Revolutionary War was the Oklahoma City bombing, which was the act of a practical terrorist who had deluded himself into believing America was ripe for another revolution that required only a catalytic event. It was about as vicious as an act of practical terrorism ever gets, and the difference in scope and scale (as well as intention) between the attack on one mid-sized Federal building in Oklahoma and the attacks on the World Trade Center provide a very good measure of the relative dangers of practical vs. apocalyptic terrorism. Indeed, we may find that apocalyptic terror is capable of deeds far in excess of those in New York (especially employing weapons of mass destruction), while practical terror always has a ceiling. Admittedly, that ceiling may be much higher in other cultures, especially when speaking of ideology-based, regime-sponsored terror employed against the regime’s own population during an era of transition, as in Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao’s China, or Pol Pot’s Cambodia, but this essay will confine itself to international and anti-state terrorism, in the interests of pertinence and brevity. One concern we should have about practical terrorists, though, is

the copy-cat effect—will they think bigger now that they have seen what apocalyptic terrorists achieved on September 11th, 2001?

While a few of the most extreme fundamentalist Christians in America have committed terrorist acts to achieve explicit goals, they tend to be “off-the-reservation” individuals or small groups who interpret doctrine with obsessive rigor and whose parent churches, though sometimes vociferous, do not encourage or support their acts of terror. Despite the cloak of religion, these terrorists have more in common with the Weathermen or the Symbionese Liberation Army than they do with al Qaeda. They want to change society’s rules, not to destroy society. The behavior patterns of these domestic fanatics are, as stated above, those of practical terrorists, even in the way some of them idealize “unborn children” and mothers, while demonizing those women whose behavior they find anathema—apocalyptic terrorists demonize plenty of their fellow human beings, but idealize none except their own leaders and martyrs to the cause. The idealization of a segment of humanity is a consistent hallmark of the practical terrorist.

Anti-choice terrorists in the United States are not trying to jump-start the Book of Revelations. Whatever we may feel individually about the issue of “pro-life” vs. “pro-choice,” the extremists who indulge in terrorizing behavior have a practical agenda that hopes to change behaviors and laws. Their greatest similarity to apocalyptic terrorists is that they long to turn back the clock to a past they have idealized, as did the decidedly-secular Unabomber. In the past, much terrorism sought to modernize decaying societies; today, terrorism increasingly seeks to restore past strictures on behavior. Much of the terrorism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was revolutionary, but, increasingly, both practical and apocalyptic terrorists are reactionary—and the issue of the role of women in society almost invariably plays a role in their agendas (women seem to get the worst of it in every religion, and it is likely that only the splintering of Western churches allowed the productive liberation of women in our own societies; wherever a single orthodoxy prevails, women occupy a subordinate position in society—even in the United States, a geographical plot of the regions that maintain the strongest insistence on “traditional” roles for women consistently highlights those regions that are the least developed economically and culturally, and the most religiously homogeneous).

Perhaps the closest figure to Osama bin Laden that America has ever produced was John Brown. Millions of people thought he was right, too. And we have to wonder what that cherished American “saint” might have done had he possessed twenty-first century technology. He, too, reveled in a “cleansing” bath of blood. Perhaps our saving grace today is merely that successful economies and flowering societies spawn fewer zealots. But should apocalyptic terrorists from the Islamic world ever manage a truly devastating attack upon America, they might find a new John Brown waiting in our wings. *With* twenty-first century technology. Certainly, no sane person in the West wants the current conflict with terrorism to become a religious war. But the apocalyptic terrorists and their supporters already consider it to be one. And we in America probably underestimate our own capacity for savagery against another religion, if sufficiently provoked. Abraham Lincoln may be the greatest figure in American history, but John Brown is the most haunting.

Longing for the End of Days

The apocalyptic terrorists of the Islamic world are the most menacing individuals in the world today. And they intend to be. It is difficult for citizens in a successful, secular society to grasp the degree to which these men see themselves as God’s avengers. In the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, numerous analysts and commentators have attempted to discover coherent goals and logical behavior in the actions of such terrorists. But we lack the vocabulary or knowledge of the human psyche to cleanly describe the motivations, impulses and visions of such men.

One way to visualize the difference between the more-familiar practical terrorists and these apocalyptic terrorists is to describe their archetypes in terms of painting. The exemplary practical terrorist is like a classic representational painter, a Poussin or even a da Vinci: The canvas is coherent at a distance and, the closer you come to the surface, the more fine detail and granularity you see. But apocalyptic terrorists are like the late impressionists—Cezanne, for example. Their “work” is only coherent when viewed from a certain distance. As you approach the canvas, the forms dissolve into splotches and

lose their apparent definition. So, too, the apocalyptic terrorist may seem to have explanations, even justifications, for his attacks. He “wants the U.S. out of all Islamic countries,” or reviles the invasive corruption of the West, or desires the establishment of a Palestinian state (on own his strict terms). But, upon closer inspection, all these relatively rational purposes begin to blur and dissolve. *It is impossible to content the apocalyptic terrorist. His agenda is against this world, not of it. Viewed closely, his vision is inchoate, intuitive and destructive without limit. It is reality that has not pleased him, and he wants to destroy reality.*

Although he views the world as sinful and corrupt, the apocalyptic terrorist’s vision of an afterlife is ecstatic. He is absolutely certain that his deeds will be rewarded in the heaven of his particular god. This model is by no means limited to Islamic terrorists—it enraptures apocalyptic terrorists in every susceptible religion. Our problem is that, today, the failures and psychological debilities of the Muslim world spawn an increasing number of these deadly visionaries and their sufficiently-convinced accomplices.

Aggressive religious cults are a predictable aberration of troubled societies struggling through periods of profound change. Some human beings simply cannot deal with the sudden fracturing of their verities and the inadequacy of their long-held, cherished beliefs. Particularly for the apocalyptic terrorist, belief is all or nothing. If his earlier beliefs—either in a particular form of religion or in a cultural milieu—fail to answer his practical and, above all, psychological needs, he tends to rush to another extreme. The appearance of suicidal Islamic terrorists who, earlier in their lives, seemed well-integrated into society and even fond of Western things, is a perfect manifestation of this phenomenon. We fail to recognize the difficulty those from other cultures face in internalizing the extremely-complex, synthetic value system that allows Americans to operate in our very challenging, apparently-contradictory, super-charged society. An outsider can take pleasure in a pair of Nikes or Hollywood films, even revel in the sexual freedom he finds among some segments of Western societies, only to find that his cultural background has not armored him for the disjunctions of the “American way of life.”

Americans are masterful at social improvisation and evolution (obviously, with many individual exceptions), but this is not a developed skill in more traditional societies. A

single, ill-timed rejection, a number of real or perceived humiliations, a gnawing sense of inadequacy and anomie, a failed university course, a lost job, or a nasty touch of venereal disease all can turn the seemingly Westernized visitor from a traditional society into a rabid hater of all things Western as he turns for emotional comfort to the verities of an idealized version of his root culture (from which he earlier had thought to escape). Others need no direct contact with the West to feel immensely threatened by its implications of moral lawlessness (as perceived by the outsider) and ruthless competition (which he suspects he cannot outface).

Whether the terrorist has an old immigration stamp in his passport or has never left the alleys of Cairo or Karachi, the unifying factor is the fragility of his “cradle,” the inadequacy of cherished Islamic traditions to cope not only with the post-modern, but even with primitive versions of the modern world. A religio-social society that restricts the flow of information, prefers myth to reality, oppresses women, makes family, clan or ethnic identity the basis for social and economic relations, subverts the rule of secular law, undervalues scientific and liberal education, discourages independent thought, and believes that ancient religious law should govern all human relations has no hope whatsoever of competing with America and the vibrant, creative states of the West and the Pacific Rim. *We are succeeding, the Islamic world is failing, and they hate us for it.* The preceding sentence encapsulates the cause of the terrorism of September 11th, 2001, and no amount of “rational” analysis or nervous explanation will make this basic truth go away.

The last time a “world” and an all-encompassing way of life failed in the West was during the early years of the Protestant Reformation (of note, economic failures alone do not seem to drive people to apocalyptic behaviors—the Irish Potato Famine, the eviction of Highland crofters, the collapse of the Silesian weaving industry, the destruction of the artisan’s way of life by mass manufacturing, or the breakdown of coal mining all failed to spawn millenarian movements; apocalyptic behavior is spawned by *cultural* failure in the broadest sense). The “great chain of being” worldview that comforted a majority of the European population during the Middle Ages could not withstand the stresses of nascent modernity and, above all, the explosion of information after Gutenberg’s development of the movable-type printing press in the mid-fifteenth century. Although the theological

and social issues took centuries to resolve (and some *still* have not been laid to rest), the fate of the Protestant Reformation was essentially decided in its first dozen years. The subsequent hundred and twenty-odd years of inter-confessional warfare was about the boundaries of Protestantism, not really about its existence—although contemporaries saw it otherwise. In that initial “long decade,” a way of life developed over centuries, a sequence of beliefs and behaviors that had withstood near-constant feudal warfare, recurrent famines and the unparalleled slaughter of the Black Death, collapsed with astonishing speed north of the Alps. Certainly, there long had been fissures in the fabric of society and state, and economic burdens helped trigger the assault on the old, uniform system, but what matters for our discussion is that the deepest verities--issues of salvation, sanctity and the very nature of worship, as well as elementary questions of how church power is vested and which behaviors find divine favor—were suddenly open to debate not only by learned theologians, but by common men and women (and a great many not-very-learned men of the cloth). As the old, monolithic structure of belief and prescribed behavior broke down—with a speed that would bewilder even today’s mentally-agile Americans—millions of human beings literally lost their bearings. Some quickly found refuge in a new mainstream of Protestant churches, while others never let go of, or quickly re-embraced, the Roman church. But many thousands could not content themselves with either the old way or the more temperate of the new ways. And they initiated the greatest outbreak of popular terror the West has ever known, the Peasants’ Revolt in the Germanies in the 1520s. Bloodier than any revolutionary movement prior to the Russian Civil War, its impulses were apocalyptic in the extreme.

The Peasants’ Revolt, or Peasants’ Wars, is misnamed to a degree, since the rebellious leaders were extreme-radical theologians, lesser knights, and some members of a fractious, often-impecunious nobility. The peasants and some disaffected townsmen provided the mass, not the minds—although some hallucinatory visionaries did emerge from the lower levels of society. And, as East German historians anxiously pointed out, the outbreak of millenarian terror in the mid-1520s had secular antecedents in the *Bundschuh* movement and disparate local revolts that preceded the Reformation. But it was the crisis of faith and the loss of the certainty of salvation as a reward for traditional behaviors (and a new calculus for damnation) that catalyzed disparate, local movements

with concrete grudges into a horde of impassioned killers chasing redemption with swords, scythes and torches.

Although the East Germans of the old GDR tried to repackage him as a proto-socialist, the revolutionary and theologian Thomas Muentzer may have been the closest major figure the West has produced to Osama bin Laden (the practical terrorists of the Counter-Reformation and the Inquisition don't even come close). Muentzer, who led his rebels behind a blood-red cross (alternatively reported as a blood-red sword), left a trail of devastation across the middle of the Germanies that only ceased when a coalition of the nobility and knights brought him to a final, apocalyptic battle that ended with an uncompromising pursuit and massacre of the insurgents, followed by the ingenious torture and executions of their captured leaders.

The suddenness and scale of the rebellion had caught all of the authorities of the day by surprise, and it took time to organize an effective response. In one of the paradoxes of history, the decisive revolutionary in the history of the West, Martin Luther, was terrified by the insurgency's embrace of social chaos and the lack of obedience to traditional authority (which he wrestled with rather successfully himself), as well as by the explicit threat to the security of his own reformed church, which was still struggling for legitimacy. In what many consider the greatest blot upon his life and work, Luther wrote a vitriolic public manifesto justifying the extermination of the rebels by any means necessary. To be fair, Luther always saw himself as a loyal, if misunderstood reformer of a true church, not as a revolutionary, but few men know themselves of their effects. Luther condemned that which he himself had unleashed (his situation bore at least a superficial similarity to the U.S. role in fostering fundamentalist extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the excesses of which now appall us).

In the meantime, the various, ill-disciplined bands of peasants and townsmen, some attracted to charismatic leadership and others simply delighted by the opportunity for revenge and destruction, had sacked castles and towns, tortured, raped and slaughtered any members of the elite who fell into their hands, devastated churches and iconic art, and reveled in destruction. While there was a great deal of simply "having their own back" in all this for the peasants and the poor of the towns, Muentzer and the other charismatic extremists preached an "end of days" and a sort of purification through

destruction that absolved their followers in advance. Muentzer and his familiars read messages in the Heavens, heard God's voice on a private line, and interpreted the Scriptures (especially the Book of Revelation) in a manner that gave their followers license to almost any excess. Their mentality of dragging heaven down to earth through violence, of helping God bring on His Day of Judgment, and of avenging the oppressed through the slaughter of real or imagined oppressors, provides the last, five-centuries-old shred of evidence for the campus leftist's argument that "We're really all alike." Indeed, Osama bin Laden is Islam's Thomas Muentzer—a hero to many, a demon to the rest of us. Like John Brown, Muentzer lacked our ultra-modern technology of destruction. But had he possessed nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, he doubtless would have used them. The authorities he attempted to bring down with terror realized that he had to be killed, and they killed him and as many of his followers as they could track down. The soil of Thuringia, northern Franconia, Eastern Hesse and the foothills of the Harz were soaked with blood. But Central Europe never suffered another apocalyptic uprising of a similar scale. And the chastened followers of Muentzer and his co-believers who survived, though they long nursed grievances, turned inward, forming, among others, the Anabaptist movements from the Rhineland helped pioneer America.

Dying for God

An obvious counter-argument to the suggestion that apocalyptic terrorists are possessed by a suicidal impulse is that Osama bin Laden seems to want to stay very much alive. But the desire for self-annihilation takes many forms. In the case of the operational leaders of the September 11th attacks there was, indeed, an impatience with this world and a readiness to embrace a self-justifying excuse for leaving it behind. Although each of those terrorists would have rejected out of hand the suggestion that they were suicidal or that their discontents were primarily of an inward nature, the fact is that few men willingly recognize their motives—or have either the wish or the ability to do so. Often, motive is more easily identified from without. But men who are at peace with

themselves and the world do not destroy themselves and as large a portion of the world as they can take down with them.

As dangerous as the “martyrs” of September 11th, 2001, were, those of the Osama bin Laden cast are much more worrisome. With or without weapons of mass destruction, the foot-soldier terrorists rushing to kill themselves in a dramatic, annihilating gesture may create plenty of horror and havoc, but the “long-run suicides,” those who judge themselves too important to throw away in a “minor” episode, are more dangerous by far. The do-it-now personalities attack specific targets, but the apocalyptic masters seek to destroy vast systems (of note, the demands of practical terrorists sometimes diminish over time, as they gain perspective on what is or is not possible, but the demands of apocalyptic terrorists only increase and grow ever more fantastic).

Osama bin Laden is willing to die—but he wants a commensurate effect when he goes. He is in no hurry and takes great pleasure from the rising crescendo of destruction he can effect through his underlings. But he is not a survive-at-any-cost figure (unlike bureaucrat-terrorists, such as Saddam or Milosevic). Osama bin Laden will, indeed, die for his beliefs—and he will do so with great willingness if he believes he can extract a cataclysmic price in return for his own life. While it would be inaccurate to say there is nothing at which he would not stop, the things that would give him pause are inconsequential to us—taboos in daily behavior, notions of physical pollution, and the corruption of religious rituals. The totems of belief and reassuring behaviors are more important to him than complex theological arguments—no matter how much Islamic commentary he may have memorized to use to support his position. He may know all of the Koran by heart—but that, too, is a ritual function. His theology cannot be penetrated by argument, though it can be bolstered by agreement. In terms of religion, he imagines himself as Allah’s humble servant but is, in fact, an extreme egomaniac, “leading God from below.” When he imagines his own end, it is less a vision of entering a physical paradise and more a sense of merging with his god. He wants to go out with a very big bang.

This is not to suggest that Osama bin Laden is plotting his own end, or that he is anxious to die. Rather, he is *willing* to die and finds the notion of transcendence through death enticing rather than forbidding. The world reaches him only in negative senses,

and, unless the biology of fear kicks in as he faces his own death, he will not much regret leaving this world behind. The corollary, of course, is that he is never reluctant to sacrifice others to his vision and his will. As of this writing, there is a theory making the rounds that Osama is, in fact, a very clever manipulator who has a complex, rational plan to get what he wants. This is probably true—but only reflects the least, most superficial part of his character. There are many varieties of madness, and a Hitler can plan very well under congenial circumstances; so, too, does Osama bin Laden. But he cannot be dealt with as a rational actor, since, under the cunning surface, he is irrational in the extreme. His methods make cruel sense, but his goals are far beyond the demise of a particular regime or the recognition of a Palestinian state. He wants to destroy, at the very least, a civilization he has cast as Satanic. He does not want to defeat the West—he wants to annihilate us. If he had the technology today, he would use it.

Evidence and the Believer

One of the most frustrating things for Westerners since September 11th, 2001, has been the demands throughout the Islamic world for “proof” that Osama bin Laden was behind the attacks. At the same time, “friendly” Arab governments condone or even quietly support suggestions that “Zionists” directed the attacks, and that American Jews were warned before the strikes on the World Trade Center towers and that 4,000 of them did not show up for work on the fateful day. We cannot believe that anyone could believe such folly and we want to extend proof of the truth. But empirical reality is almost irrelevant within the Islamic world—comforting myths are much more powerful—and the mental processes at work are so fundamentally different from our own that we literally cannot comprehend them.

Were we to provide a video-taped confession by Osama bin Laden, Muslims would insist that Hollywood had staged it. Were we to provide multi-media records of Arabs committing the deeds of September 11th, the response would be the same. Statistics, facts, evidence, proof—none of this has much weight in the Muslim consciousness. I have personally never quite gotten used to the stunning ability of even educated people

between the Nile and the Himalayas to believe with deep conviction and passion that which is patently, provably false.

Another aspect of the Islamic mind is its ability to disaggregate and compartmentalize. One moment, a Pakistani or an Egyptian might tell you that Israel staged the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, then, a moment later, tell you what a great hero Osama bin Laden is and that the Muslims who piloted the planes were great heroes. We see an obvious lapse in logic, but our Muslim counterpart sees nothing of the kind. He can comfortably “believe” both “truths.”

Part of the problem is that empirical truth comforts us, since we’re a success story. The Joe-Friday facts support our satisfying view of ourselves. But few facts support a positive self-image within the Islamic world. The flight into fantasy has been going on for a very long time—at least since the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in 1492—but the impact of globalization, modernity and now post-modernity have driven hundreds of millions of Muslims into a fabulous refuge of their own collective construction. Powerful myths may be the only thing the Islamic world is good at building.

What it means for us is that we should not waste too much effort trying to prove that which will never be believed, no matter how much supporting data we offer. We can convince through our deeds alone—and even then only partially. When we kill Osama bin Laden, millions will refuse to believe in his death (even if we put the corpse on a Middle East tour, complete with on-the-spot DNA sampling). And the talent for overlaying conspiracies on even the most benign Western actions will always over-ride the reality of any good we seek to do or accomplish (of course, America has its own conspiracy fanatics, but in our society they exist on the margins, while the belief in complex, malevolent Western and “Zionist” conspiracies is integral to middle-of-the-road discourse in the Muslim world).

We are dealing with a delusional civilization—and this is a new problem in history. Certainly, the degree of delusion varies from individual to individual, to some extent between social classes, and somewhat between peoples and states. But it means that the American and Western tradition of reasoning with opponents, of convincing doubters, and of marshalling evidence has far less potency—and often none—in dealing with the Islamic world.

We may believe with great satisfaction that we have the truth on our side—but myth is on their side, and myth can be more powerful than truth. Some noble or hapless souls may sacrifice their lives in service to the truth. But millions will rush to die for a cherished myth of themselves.

Only physical reality, brought home with stunning force, can make much of an impression. Even that will be rationalized away in time. But where the truth cannot make headway, punitive or preventive violence must protect us.

We, too, have our comforting myths, among them that all the people of the world are really just "like us," that all men are finally subject to reason, and, most perniciously, that violence is a desperate measure that solves nothing. In fact, billions of people are not "like us," surprisingly few men are subject to reason when reason threatens their most precious beliefs, and violence is often the only meaningful solution.

Palestinian terrorists and the dark transformation

We are worried about the "Palestinian" problem for many of the wrong reasons. Beyond our appalling double standard of criticizing Israel for killing known terrorists and their commanders while tut-tutting at Palestinian suicide bombings that kill and maim dozens of innocents, we are making the classic American error of pursuing short-term comfort over long-term benefits, pursuing the impossible goal of placating the Islamic world (impossible, at least, without countenancing the destruction of Israel). In theory, the goal of a Palestinian state makes sense and, in reality, its creation appears inevitable, and doubtless must make the best of it. Our error is to imagine that the creation of that state will bring peace. On the contrary, it will only elevate the struggle to another level. Too many Palestinians are now the enemies of any peace that allows Israel's continued existence, and, beyond the near-Babel of rhetoric, for many militants, the ultimate destruction of Israel is a far more captivating goal than is the establishment of a rule-of-law Palestinian state that expects them to deal with an unsatisfying daily reality. We do not have to like everything the Israelis do to recognize that our long term interests and theirs coincide. We will never find a resolute ally on the other side, and this new cockpit

of crisis, from the Nile to the Hindu Kush (and perhaps beyond) consumes concessions with an insatiable appetite.

What is immediately relevant to a discussion of terrorism, however, is the metamorphosis that has been underway in the ranks of Palestinian terrorists. Over the past few decades, they have evolved from a more secular, practical outlook with finite (if sometimes extreme) goals to an increasingly apocalyptic, religious orientation. The shift is still underway, and plenty of the more-secular variety of terrorists still exist, but fervent Islam increasingly trumps political calculation among anti-Israeli terrorists. A cardinal symptom is the increasing percentage of suicide bombers. Palestinians have long been willing to die for their cause (in many ways an easier alternative to devoting a life of hard work to the construction of a state and its infrastructure), but the terrorist who *might* die in the course of a daring operation is giving way more and more to the terrorist who *intends* to die as a consequence of his action. And if you compare the rhetoric of the 1970s and 1980s to the fevered declarations of contemporary Palestinian terrorists, their supporters and advocates, the intensifying embrace of religion is unmistakable.

An analyst with no other knowledge of the situation would assume that this radicalization into apocalyptic religious behavior must be the result of the failure of the secular approach, but the actual situation is the reverse: The Palestinians have made impressive progress toward complete self-government and a state of their own; they have won an astonishing legitimacy in the eyes of the world, including the United States; and, except for the destruction of Israel, their original aims are well on the way to fulfillment. Another analyst might say that the pace has been too slow, that discontents were allowed to boil over. In retrospect, however, Palestinian progress has been relatively swift in historical terms. The source of the radicalization lies elsewhere.

The Palestinians, who are in many respects the most successful, educated, secular and “Westernized” Arabs since the shattering of Lebanon a generation ago, have been catching the contagion sweeping the Arab world, if more slowly than in more backward regions. Increasingly, Israel is more of a mythologized object than a tangible reality (although, for Palestinians, the reality admittedly can be pretty harsh), more a demon to be slain than a state to be challenged. The thorough demonization of Israel is now the single biggest object to any peace plan. While there always was a religious and

civilizational element to the conflict in Palestine, the change over the past decades has been profound. No matter how generous the terms offered to a future Palestinian state, a substantial, deadly portion of the Palestinian population (to say nothing of Arabs of other nationalities) will never be satisfied, materially or, more importantly, psychologically. The Arab world's spiritual crisis, born of a generalized failure, needs the demon Israel (and the demon America) far more than it needs peace in the West Bank or Gaza. Israel is the great excuse for failure, and it will never be viewed as a mere tolerable neighbor.

The roots of the fervor that transmutes all too easily into an apocalyptic vision lie in the general failure of the Islamic world to compete. What had been a political crisis is now a massive psychological crisis. Some years ago, a popular work of history was entitled "The Madness of Crowds." We are now dealing with the madness of a civilization. Of course, many readers will dismiss this as hateful or vicious thinking—and I personally wish the reality were otherwise. But the doubters have only to wait. Islam's sense of failure is only going to intensify (because its counter-productive behaviors and values will not change), and the apocalyptic, vengeful impulse will intensify in turn. It is one of the tragedies of the Arab world that a deadly, crippling segment among the Palestinians—who had at least a chance of performing competitively—have been collapsing backward into a medieval vision of religion just as they approach their long-championed secular goals. While it is impossible to predict the pace and scope of this transformation—and it may yet be stymied by Palestinian secularists, who increasingly realize that they, too, are in a battle with religious extremism—we may find ourselves hoping the blander forces of corruption, greed and selfishness in the Palestinian Authority will somehow trump the fervor of the rising generation of believers. It is not only an unattractive position in which to find ourselves, but an almost hopeless one.

Elsewhere, the same phenomenon of transformation from practical to apocalyptic terrorism has taken hold broadly. Where once Islamic terrorists espoused sloppy versions of socialism, communism, Nasserism, Arab nationalism, or many another fuzzy ism, they are increasingly *Islamic* terrorists. It is a long way down into the darkness from the once-feared terrorists of Black September to the mass murderers of September 11th. For all of us who have lived through the last half century, it is astonishing to note that George

Habash now looks moderate in comparison to the hyper-charged, god-intoxicated terrorists of today.

As the Israelis have already learned, even if they cannot openly acknowledge it, there is no solution to this challenge, only a determination to survive on the most advantageous terms possible. A friend of mine commented, shortly after September 11th, that “We’re all Israelis now.” He was correct, in the sense that our lives are no longer inviolable. But we have far greater power and wealth than does Israel, and better geography, globalization notwithstanding. We have the power to set the terms strategically, and even to fix the terms of most tactical encounters. But before we can do so, we must recognize how the world and terrorism have changed. And then we must have the strength of will to do what must be done.

III. Fighting Terror: Do’s and Don’ts for a Superpower

1. *Be feared.*
2. *Identify the type of terrorists you face, and know your enemy as well as you possibly can.* Although tactics may be similar, strategies for dealing with practical vs. apocalyptic terrorists can differ widely. Practical terrorists may have legitimate grievances that deserve consideration, although their methods cannot be tolerated. Apocalyptic terrorists, no matter their rhetoric, seek your destruction and must be killed to the last man. The apt metaphor is cancer—you cannot hope for success if you only cut out part of the tumor. For the apocalyptic terrorist, evading your efforts can easily be turned into a public triumph. Our bloodiest successes will create far fewer terrorists and sympathizers than our failures.
3. *Do not be afraid to be powerful.* Cold War-era gambits of proportionate response and dialog may have some utility in dealing with practical terrorists, but they are counter-productive in dealing with apocalyptic terrorists. Our great strengths are wealth and raw power. When we fail to bring those strengths to bear, we contribute to our own

defeat. For a superpower to think small—which has been our habit across the last decade, at least—is self-defeating folly. Our responses to terrorist acts should make the world gasp.

4. *Speak bluntly.* Euphemisms are interpreted as weakness by our enemies and mislead the American people. Speak of killing terrorists and destroying their organizations. Timid speech leads to timid actions. Explain when necessary, but do not apologize. Expressions of regret are never seen as a mark of decency by terrorists or their supporters, but only as a sign that our will is faltering. Blame the terrorists as the root cause whenever operations have unintended negative consequences. *Never* go on the rhetorical defensive.
5. *Concentrate on winning the propaganda war where it is winnable.* Focus on keeping or enhancing the support from allies and well-disposed clients, but do not waste an inordinate amount of effort trying to win unwinnable hearts and minds. Convince hostile populations through victory.
6. *Do not be drawn into a public dialog with terrorists*—especially not with apocalyptic terrorists. You cannot win. You legitimize the terrorists by addressing them even through a third medium, and their extravagant claims will resound more successfully on their own home ground than anything you can say. Ignore absurd accusations, and never let the enemy’s claims slow or sidetrack you. The terrorist wants you to react, and your best means of unbalancing him and his plan is to ignore his accusations.
7. *Avoid “planning creep.”* Within our vast bureaucratic system, too many voices compete for attention and innumerable agendas—often selfish and personal--intrude on any attempt to act decisively. Focus on the basic mission—the destruction of the terrorists—with all the moral, intellectual and practical rigor you can bring to bear. All other issues, from future nation-building, to alliance consensus, to humanitarian concerns are secondary.

8. *Maintain resolve.* Especially in the Middle East and Central Asia, “experts” and diplomats will always present you with a multitude of good reasons for doing nothing, or for doing too little (or for doing exactly the wrong thing). Fight as hard as you can within the system to prevent diplomats from gaining influence over the strategic campaign. Although their intentions are often good, our diplomats and their obsolete strategic views are the terrorist’s unwitting allies—and diplomats are extremely jealous of military success and military authority in “their” region (where their expertise is never as deep or subtle as they believe it to be). Beyond the problem with our diplomats, the broader forces of bureaucratic entropy are an internal threat. The counter-terrorist campaign must be not only resolute, but constantly self-rejuvenating—in ideas, techniques, military and inter-agency combinations, and sheer energy. “Old hands” must be stimulated constantly by new ideas.
9. *When in doubt, hit harder than you think necessary.* Success will be forgiven. Even the best-intentioned failure will not. When military force is used against terrorist networks, it should be used with such power that it stuns even our allies. We must get over our “cowardice in means.” While small-scale raids and other knife-point operations are useful against individual targets, broader operations should be overwhelming. Of course, targeting limitations may inhibit some efforts—but, whenever possible, maximum force should be used in simultaneous operations at the very beginning of a campaign. Do not hesitate to supplement initial target lists with extensive bombing attacks on “nothing” if they can increase the initial psychological impact. Demonstrate power whenever you can. Show, don’t tell.
10. *Whenever legal conditions permit, kill terrorists on the spot* (do not give them a chance to surrender, if you can help it). Contrary to academic wisdom, the surest way to make a martyr of a terrorist is to capture, convict and imprison him, leading to endless efforts by sympathizers to stage kidnappings, hijacking and other events intended to liberate the imprisoned terrorist(s). This is war, not law enforcement.

11. *Never listen to those who warn that ferocity on our part reduces us to the level of the terrorists.* That is the argument of the campus, not of the battlefield, and it insults America's service members and the American people. Historically, we have proven, time after time, that we can do a tough, dirty job for our country without any damage to our nation's moral fabric (Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not interfere with American democracy, values or behavior).
12. *Spare and protect innocent civilians whenever possible, but do not let the prospect of civilian casualties interfere with ultimate mission accomplishment.* This is a fight to protect the American people, and we must do so whatever the cost, or the price in American lives may be devastating. In a choice between "us and them," the choice is always "us."
13. *Do not allow the terrorists to hide behind religion.* Apocalyptic terrorists cite religion as a justification for attacking us; in turn, we cannot let them hide behind religious holidays, taboos, strictures or even sacred terrain. We must establish a consistent reputation for relentless pursuit and destruction of those who kill our citizens. Until we do this, our hesitation will continue to strengthen our enemy's ranks and his resolve.
14. *Do not allow third parties to broker a "peace," a truce, or any pause in operations.*
One of the most difficult challenges in fighting terrorism on a global scale is the drag produced by nervous allies. We must be single-minded. The best thing we can do for our allies in the long-term is to be so resolute and so strong that they value their alliance with us all the more. We must recognize the innate strength of our position and stop allowing regional leaders with counterproductive local agendas to subdue or dilute our efforts.
15. *Don't flinch.* If an operation goes awry and friendly casualties are unexpectedly high, immediately bolster morale and the military's image by striking back swiftly in a manner that inflicts the maximum possible number of casualties on the enemy and his

supporters. Hit back as graphically as possible, to impress upon the local and regional players that you weren't badly hurt or deterred in the least.

16. *Do not worry about alienating already-hostile populations.*

17. *Whenever possible, humiliate your enemy in the eyes of his own people.* Do not try to use reasonable arguments against him. Shame him publicly, in any way you can. Create doubt where you cannot excite support. Most apocalyptic terrorists, especially, come from cultures of male vanity. Disgrace them at every opportunity. Done successfully, this both degrades them in the eyes of their followers and supporters, and provokes the terrorist to respond, increasing his vulnerability.

18. *If the terrorists hide, strike what they hold dear,* using clandestine means and, whenever possible, foreign agents to provoke them to break cover and react. Do not be squeamish. Your enemy is not. Subtlety is not a superpower strength—but the raw power to do that which is necessary is our great advantage. We forget that, while the world may happily chide or accuse us—or complain of our “inhumanity”—no one can stop us if we maintain our strength of will. Much of the world will complain no matter what we do. Hatred of America is the default position of failed individuals and failing states around the world, in every civilization, and there is nothing we can do to change their minds. We refuse to understand how much of humanity will find excuses for evil, so long as the evil strikes those who are more successful than the apologists themselves. This is as true of American academics, whose eagerness to declare our military efforts a failure is unflagging, or European clerics, who still cannot forgive America's magnanimity at the end of World War II, as it is of unemployed Egyptians or Pakistanis. The psychologically marginalized are at least as dangerous as the physically deprived.

19. *Do not allow the terrorists sanctuary in any country, at any time, under any circumstances.* Counter-terrorist operations must, above all, be relentless. This does not necessarily mean that military operations will be constantly underway—

sometimes it will be surveillance efforts, or deception plans, or operations by other agencies. But the overall effort must never pause for breath. We must be faster, more resolute, more resourceful—and, ultimately, even more uncompromising than our enemies.

20. *Never declare victory.* Announce successes and milestones. But never give the terrorists a chance to embarrass you after a public pronouncement that “the war is over.”
21. *Impress upon the minds of terrorists and potential terrorists everywhere, and upon the populations and governments inclined to support them, that American retaliation will be powerful and uncompromising.* You will never deter fanatics, but you can frighten those who might support, harbor or attempt to use terrorists for their own ends. Our basic task in the world today is to restore a sense of American power, capabilities and resolve. We must be hard, or we will be struck wherever we are soft. It is folly for charity to precede victory. First win, then unclench your fist.
22. *Do everything possible to make terrorists and their active supporters live in terror themselves.* Turn the tide psychologically and practically. While this will not deter hardcore apocalyptic terrorists, it will dissipate their energies as they try to defend themselves—and fear will deter many less-committed supporters of terror. Do not be distracted by the baggage of the term “assassination.” This is a war. The enemy, whether a hijacker or a financier, violates the laws of war by his refusal to wear a uniform and by purposely targeting civilians. He is by definition a war criminal. On our soil, he is either a spy or a saboteur, and not entitled to the protections of the U.S. Constitution. Those who abet terrorists must grow afraid to turn out the lights to go to sleep.
23. *Never accept the consensus of the Washington intelligentsia, which looks backward to past failures, not forward to future successes..*

24. *In dealing with Islamic apocalyptic terrorists, remember that their most cherished symbols are fewer and far more vulnerable than are the West's.* Ultimately, no potential target can be regarded as off limits when the United States is threatened with mass casualties. Worry less about offending foreign sensibilities and more about protecting Americans.

25. *Do not look for answers in recent history, which is still unclear and subject to personal emotion.* Begin with the study of the classical world—specifically Rome, which is the nearest model to the present-day United States. Mild with subject peoples, to whom they brought the rule of ethical law, the Romans in their rise and at their apogee were implacable with their enemies. The utter destruction of Carthage brought centuries of local peace, while the later empire's attempts to appease barbarians consistently failed.

Note: The author does not claim to be an expert on terrorism or on any other subject. He is simply a former soldier who saw something of the world and then thought about what he saw.